



**Women's Multicultural  
Resource & Counselling Centre**

## Anxiety and the Black Population

All adolescence experiences some amount of anxiety at times. Anxiety is actually a normal reaction to stress, and sometimes it helps teens deal with tense or overwhelming situations. Similar to adults many activities such as public speaking, final reports, important sport competitions, or even socializing with specific people can cause feelings of discomfort and apprehension. Also, as adults, they may also experience excessive sweating, an increase in their heartbeat or changes in how they breathe. That's how the brain responds to anxious feelings.

For some adolescents, however, anxiety can go beyond these typical symptoms to the point of negatively impacting their participation in extracurricular activities, friendships and family relationships, and their schoolwork. In a nutshell, when it starts to impact your adolescents' functionality or normal daily living, the possibility of an anxiety disorder should be considered. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 25% of 13- to 18-year-olds have an anxiety disorder, and just under 6% have a severe anxiety disorder.

Research and history tell us that three basic images exist for Black females-the Strong Black Woman, the Angry Black Woman, and the Jezebel/Video Vixen (I). These images affect how other people see Black women and how they see themselves. This in turn impacts the rates of Black females assessing services they need.



### **Social Anxiety**

In social situations, they have been taught that they have to be twice as good to go half as far. They are representing the race which creates additional stress. Third, there can be an on-going sense that they are being watched more closely than their white counterparts; beliefs that are not necessarily inaccurate. These beliefs coupled with the Strong

Black Woman image increase risk for social anxiety.

Another social anxiety risk factor in the school setting is the “acting white” accusation. As the images attest, far too often we forget that there are more than three (3) ways to be a Black woman in this country. The acting White accusation, has nothing to do with wanting to be White and everything to do with what it means to be Black. In other words, it is an attack on one’s racial identity which in turn, can create anxiety.

### **Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder/Acute-Stress-Disorder**

The main difference between PTSD and ASD is that a person experiencing symptoms of PTSD experiences longer than that of a person with ASD (symptoms usually resolve within a month).

The rate of sexual assault among Black women is 3.5 times higher than that of any other group in this country. Black women are also less likely to report their assault. Many suffer in silence for years, never sharing with anyone what has

happened to them. The shame and self-stigma can weigh heavy on the individual. Thus, the trauma remains, unknown and untreated and the symptoms worsen as the “family-secret” is protected.

Racism is another form of trauma that disproportionality affects Black women (and men). Trauma in the form of racism can be directly or indirectly experienced. Everyday racial micro-aggressions are direct examples of racial trauma (driving, entering a store). Vicariously witnessing race-based trauma, can be as devastating as the direct form. These emotions remain in our bodies and can have long-lasting impact.

For more information regarding how you can help support your loved one living with symptoms of anxiety or interested in learning strategies to enhance your self-care please reach out. We are here to serve you.

WMRCC team